

The Silent Voice

By Shela Shapiro

For many Albertans, travelling is a great pleasure -- a time of changing scenery and great opportunity. But for Cindy Gordon, any kind of travel, whether it be air, train, or bus, presents barriers and anxiety.

of recognition that people with disabilities have different needs. It's a misconception that the information services we're asking for when we travel are extras. They're exactly the same as what the rest of the public are accustomed to."



Cindy Gordon

Cindy is hard of hearing, and she's the newest member to the Advisory Committee on Barrier Free Transportation. Gordon's background is a rehabilitation practitioner. She sits on the Premier's

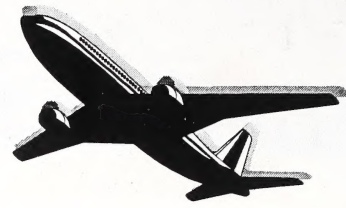
Council On The Status Of Persons With Disabilities and is involved with the disabled community as a whole. As a member of the advisory committee, she hopes to have a hand in breaking down the travel barriers and increasing awareness about the issues. "There are no visual aids, and it's frustrating. Public announcement systems are of no use to us. We need signage, screens, built in captioning, and counter loop systems," said Gordon. "There still isn't openness about the disability," Gordon explained. "There's a lack

Gordon believes businesses and services have everything to gain by making their environments more user friendly for travellers with disabilities. "We're going to increase business if the services are available for us. As soon as one of us knows that a certain hotel can accommodate our needs, we tell everybody to go there because they're accommodating. Their business increases," said Gordon.

Gordon is teaching cross disability awareness training at the Edmonton International Airport. The purpose is to train airport personnel working in the terminals, cab drivers, and airline staff in disability awareness. The course covers issues affecting seniors and travellers with a loss of hearing, vision or physical mobility. A similar course is also offered at the Calgary International Airport.

"The hard of hearing community has been quiet about identifying access needs. So we have to communicate our needs."

New Canadian Code of Practice to Assist Disabled Airline Passengers



The Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA) Introduced a Code of Practice for Canadian air carriers in November 1996, intended to make full-sized airplanes more accessible for passengers with disabilities. Included among the Code of Practice's minimal requirements are:

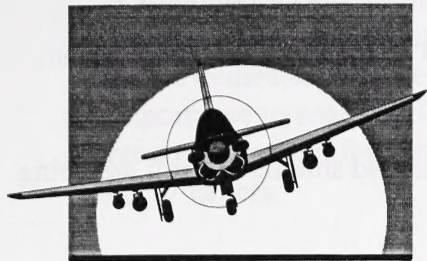
All aircraft with 30 or more passenger seats should satisfy criteria for signage, lighting, integrated boarding stairs, handrails, floor surfaces, space for service animals at passenger seats, tactile row markers, supplemental passenger briefing cards and communication of announcements (by Jan 1/99).

- ☐ Newly manufactured or retrofitted aircraft with 30 or more passenger seats should have movable aisle armrests on 50% of aisle seats (by Jan 1/99).
- ☐ Aircraft with more than one aisle should provide at least one washroom that is accessible to persons with disabilities, including persons in an on-board wheelchair (by Jan 1/99 for newly manufactured aircraft; by Jan 1/2002 for retrofitted aircraft).
- ☐ Single-aisle aircraft should have at least one washroom that is accessible to persons with disabilities, with the exception of persons in an on-board wheelchair (by Jan 1/99 newly manufactured; Jan 1/2002 retrofitted).
- ☐ Aircraft with a wheelchair-accessible washroom should carry an on-board wheelchair (by Jan 1/97). Aircraft with 60 or more passenger seats not equipped with such a washroom should provide an on-board wheelchair upon request for use by passengers who can use the washroom, but are unable to reach it without the use of such a wheelchair (Jan 1/99).
- ☐ Aircraft with 100 or more passenger seats should provide cabin storage space for a passenger-owned manual wheelchair if the configuration of the aircraft permits it (Jan 1/99).

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Aircraft Boarding Devices



Since the inception of the National Strategy Program for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities in 1991, there has been a move to decrease the emotional and physical barriers to air travel. Barriers faced by seniors and persons with disabilities in accessing air transportation, small aircraft in particular, was focus of the 1996 report entitled *Aircraft Boarding Systems For Smaller Aircraft in Alberta*.

The report examined small aircraft boarding devices from the perspective of the manufacturer, the terminal operator, the transportation provider (airlines) and the user.

A description of boarding devices and criteria to determine which device would be most suited to which operation are included in the report. It also looked at who should be responsible for purchasing the equipment, in staff training, proper maintenance, and the responsibility of users to ensure their needs are met.

Manufacturers, air carriers, terminal operators and consumer groups have suggested the following:

- ☐ Boarding devices, can provide dignified access and relieve traveller concerns.
- ☐ Standardized staff training can improve traveller confidence. The chance of injury to either the passenger or staff, or damage to aircraft can be reduced.
- ☐ Routine maintenance program should be in place. This will reduce breakdowns and vandalism of the equipment.
- ☐ Cooperative efforts or sponsorships for acquiring lifting devices that benefit all parties should be examined, as air traffic demands grow.
- ☐ Airlines should consider joint or cooperative use of lifting devices.
- ☐ Passenger safety and dignity are important. Carrying travellers on and off aircraft is not only undignified, but there is the potential of injury to both the travellers and the employees. Passenger lifting devices provide efficient, safe and dignified aircraft boarding.

As society changes and consumers demand more from business, discussions will continue. Here are a few of the influences that may impact future considerations and decisions:

- ☐ The demand for accessible transportation is increasing as the population ages.
- ☐ The commercial airline industry has evolved and smaller aircraft are being used on an increasing number of routes.
- ☐ People, including persons with disabilities and seniors, are more consumer conscious, more independent, and travelling more.
 - ♦ There are two key factors to consider. The first is the traveller's desire to travel with dignity, without compromising safety. The second is the fact that this is a business that emphasizes effectiveness and efficiency.
- ☐ Airport operators and air carriers generally have a positive view of aircraft boarding devices, but funding is a concern. Providing needed services without driving up costs creates concern but can lead to innovation. The report noted that organizations should take advantage of the trend toward community-owned and operated airports and take a cost-share approach to the purchase of equipment.



Awareness within the "Hard of Hearing" community and outside the community is essential to getting action on issues addressed in this newsletter and other issues affecting persons with disabilities.

There are ways you can become involved, including:

**Canadian Hard of Hearing Association Monthly Meeting at the
Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. or
"A Sound Family" National Conference in
May 1998 at West Edmonton Mall.**

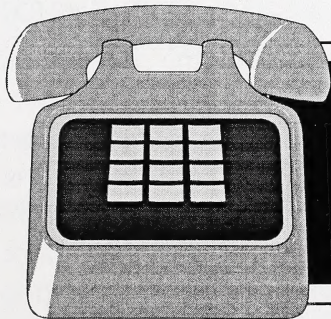
Seniors Applaud 1-800 Service

Community Development's Seniors Information Line has been in operation since February 1994. It continues to be a valuable resource to seniors by providing them with a dedicated, toll-free phone line to information on a variety of topics of importance to seniors. The need for this service is evident in the number of calls received by the information line. In November, the information officers spoke to 8,777 callers.

The information line is staffed Monday to Friday from 8:15 am to 4:30 pm. The voice-mail is available 24 hours a day and records all calls that come in after hours and staff return those calls the next morning. Family members or friends that are calling on behalf of a senior sometimes find it convenient to leave a message on the weekend and the calls are returned on Monday morning.

For increased convenience in serving seniors, service centres are established in several communities across the province and are open weekdays, 8:15 am - 4:30 pm.:

Cochrane (403) 932-2970
Lethbridge (403) 381-5231
Red Deer (403) 340-5115
Stony Plain (403) 963-2281
Grande Prairie (403) 538-5300
Medicine Hat (403) 529-3156
St. Paul (403) 645-6353
Calgary (403) 297-8418
Edmonton (403) 427-7876
or from anywhere in Alberta, call 1-800-642-3853 .



For more information
call The Canadian Hard of
Hearing Association
@ 492-7070

New Sky Shuttle to Edmonton International Airport

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Catching a flight from Edmonton International Airport will be a lot easier for some travellers now that a new and improved shuttle service was launched in the city. Edmonton Airports operates a bus service from the airport to three sections of the city which started December 1, 1996.



Laidlaw Transit is the contractor operating the service which is called SKY SHUTTLE. The three routes include to the west end of the city, downtown, and the University of Alberta on the south side. This new service will have three routes that run as often as every 20 minutes from 4:15 a.m. to 12:45 a.m.

Disability Service: Door-to-door service anywhere in Edmonton for people with disabilities. Must be booked at least 7 hours in advance call 465-8515. Callers should request a wheel chair accessible cab and indicate they are booking Sky Shuttle Service.

Cost: \$11 one-way, \$18 return. For more information or to make a booking, call 465-8515 or 1-888-GET-2EIA.

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Breaking Down the Barriers

Breaking Down the Barriers is published by Alberta Transportation and Utilities in an effort to provide timely information about transportation issues of interest to persons with disabilities and related organizations. This publication is distributed to all municipalities, service providers, provincial organizations and consumer groups in Alberta. If we missed any interest groups, let us know by phoning (403) 427-7674 and we will include them on the mailing list.

The views and opinions expressed in Breaking Down the Barriers do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Editorial Board or Alberta Transportation and Utilities. Any article in this publication may be reproduced provided credit is given to the newsletter.

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